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SIPDIS
TELEGRAM

July 18, 2004

To: No Action Addressee
Action: Unknown
From: AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI (ABU DHABI 2403 - ROUTINE)
TAGS: PGOV, KDEM
Captions: None
Subject: UAE WOMAN SCHOLAR SPEAKS UP
Ref: None

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 02403

SIPDIS
CXABU:
ACTION: POL
INFO: PAO RSO AMB DCM P/M ECON
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INFO: PAO

DISSEMINATION: POL
CHARGE: PROG

APPROVED: CDA:RALBRIGHT
DRAFTED: POL:RBASSIL
CLEARED: POL:JFMAYBURY

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FM AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5175
INFO RUEHZM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS ABU DHABI 002403

SIPDIS

STATE FOR DRL, NEA/PI, NEA/ARP, AND NEA/PPD

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KWMN](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: UAE WOMAN SCHOLAR SPEAKS UP

1. THE MFA INSTITUTE OF DIPLOMACY HOSTED DR. FATEMA AL-SAYEGH, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR AND CHAIRMAN OF THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT IN THE COLLEGE OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES AT UAE UNIVERSITY, FOR A SESSION ON UAE HISTORY, CULTURE, TRADITION AND POLITICS, HELD FOR NEW DIPLOMATS TO THE UAE ON JULY 3-4. SHE STARTED HER SESSION BY SAYING THAT HER VIEWS "DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE INSTITUTE'S," AN INFREQUENTLY USED OPENING REMARK IN A SESSION THAT TURNED OUT TO BE FRANK AND REFRESHING.

2. AL-SAYEGH HAS WRITTEN SEVEN BOOKS ON THE UAE AND THE GULF AREA, AND FREQUENTLY WRITES OPINION ARTICLES FOR THE SHARJAH-BASED ARABIC DAILY "AL-KHALEEJ". SHE HAS TRAVELED TO THE U.S. ON A FULBRIGHT PROGRAM AND HAS

DONE ACADEMIC STUDIES AND RESEARCH AT THE CENTER FOR MUSLIM/CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING AT GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY. DURING HER SESSION, AL-SAYEGH TALKED ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF UAE CITIZENS, THE INFLUENCE AND POWER OF THE TRIBAL SYSTEM, THE UAE FEDERATION, ISLAM, LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION, WOMEN'S ISSUES, AND CULTURE AND TRADITIONS.

13. AL SAYEGH, WHO IS FROM DUBAI, DESCRIBED THE UAE AS A "LOOSE FEDERATION" WITH EACH EMIRATE HAVING ITS OWN LAWS, ECONOMY AND FLAG (EXCEPT SHARJAH WHICH USES THE UAE FLAG). SHE CRITICIZED DUBAI FOR ITS LAX IMMIGRATION LAWS AND CALLED FOR A FEDERAL IMMIGRATION LAW. DUBAI HAS DEVIATED FROM ITS CULTURE AND ROOTS, AND HAS BECOME "A SIN CITY LIKE BEIRUT BEFORE THE CIVIL WAR," SHE SAID. SHE DISCUSSED THE PROBLEMS THAT DUBAI AND ABU DHABI FACED DURING THE FIRST FIVE YEARS OF THE FEDERATION AND HOW DUBAI HAD THREATENED TO LEAVE THE FEDERATION.

14. AL-SAYEGH SPOKE ABOUT HOW EACH EMIRATE OBSERVES ISLAM AND HOW SHARJAH AND RAS AL KHAIMAH OBSERVE STRICT ISLAMIC REGULATIONS BECAUSE OF THEIR PAST RELATIONS WITH THE SAUDI WAHHABIS. SHE DISCUSSED POST-9/11 OUTCOMES SUCH AS THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION'S REVISION OF ITS CURRICULUM WITH THE AIM OF ELIMINATING ANYTHING THAT ENCOURAGES INTOLERANCE AGAINST OTHER RELIGIONS. WHILE SPEAKING ABOUT RELIGION, CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS, AL-SAYEGH TRIED TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN WHAT IS CULTURAL AND WHAT IS ISLAMIC, AND MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT EACH.

15. AL-SAYEGH DESCRIBED SHEIKH ZAYED AS BEING THE STABILIZING FACTOR OF THE FEDERATION AND NOTED THAT LEADERSHIP SUCCESSION REMAINS A CONCERN.

16. AL-SAYEGH SAID THAT UAE WOMEN ARE GRANTED EQUAL EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT RIGHTS UNDER THE UAE CONSTITUTION, BUT THEY LACK POLITICAL RIGHTS. THIS WILL START TO CHANGE IN THE FUTURE WHEN WOMEN BECOME MEMBERS OF THE FEDERAL NATIONAL COUNCIL, SHE SAID. SHE ADDED THAT UAE WOMEN ARE VIEWED BY OUTSIDERS AS "BMO'S - BLACK MOVING OBJECTS", BUT IN REALITY THEY HAVE THE POWER WITHIN THE NUCLEAR FAMILY TO RAISE THE CHILDREN, AND DISCIPLINE THE HUSBAND.

17. COMMENT: AL-SAYEGH, WHO SPEAKS AND WRITES ABOUT DEMOCRACY AND REFORM IN THE ARAB WORLD, IS ONE OF THE UAE WOMEN WITH THE HIGHEST PUBLIC PROFILE. HER LECTURE WAS ONE INDICATION OF A SOCIETY MOVING TOWARD MORE FLEXIBILITY AND LESS CENSORSHIP OF SPEECH. HOWEVER, THE THREE NEWSPAPERS THAT COVERED THE EVENT, ENGLISH DAILIES KHALEEJ TIMES AND GULF NEWS, AND ARABIC DAILY AL-BAYAN, EDITED OUT SEVERAL OF HER SHARPER COMMENTS, A COMMON PRACTICE IN THE UAE.

ALBRIGHT